

Plymouth Soup Run Report for March 2022

In March 2022:

- Plymouth Soup Run served 2235 meals (an average of 72 meals per night, equivalent to 4 meals or 5% less per night than February 2022, and 4 meals or 5% more per night than March 2021; all figures rounded). The year-on-year increase is less than observed earlier in 2022, but confirms the observation that we are not seeing a winter dip in demand.
- Meals were taken to the winter provision at Hamoaze House until its closure at the end of March, and to the homes of five clients who were too unwell to come and collect food.
- We continued to receive donations of food from individuals, businesses, and surplus food redistribution projects, and have been fortunate to receive a substantial cash donation from a local Councillor's Community Fund.
- Teams made 23 referrals to the Path Rough Sleeper Team. They reported 41 instances of meeting other rough sleepers (some instances will have been of the same individuals on different occasions). 39 sleeping bags or blankets were given out to rough sleepers. With some very cold and wet weather, warm coats, hats, gloves and scarves were in demand.
- The pilot opening of Shekinah on Saturday mornings for rough sleepers and those in emergency accommodation continues to be well attended. Clients were able to meet mental health peer mentors, get advice on smoking cessation and footcare, and join art sessions. This service is providing time and space for personalised support with positive outcomes.
- A number of clients expressed anxiety about issues including their safety on the streets or in accommodation. Several needed to talk about their recent experiences of theft of possessions, bereavement, or simply distress with their current circumstances. First aid was dispensed to one client, and another who was unable to walk was helped to get a taxi home.
- Interactions with women clients stand out in feedback from teams. A woman who had experienced recent trauma was referred to the Soup Run by her local Councillor and was signposted to support services. Two other women sought help with managing medication and attending appointments. And two of the clients giving most concern to teams because of their mental health are women. On the positive side, presence of Trevi/Spark staff has helped provide specialist support to several women and we were able to mark International Women's Day on 8th March with distribution of flowers to women clients.
- Our regular young helpers from Plymouth University Islamic Society, medical students and Duke of Edinburgh Award students helped pack snacks, serve food, and distribute toiletries.
- We welcomed five new teams this month and we were also pleased to host staff or volunteers from Trevi/Spark, StreetVet, Path and Shekinah, plus a local Councillor.
- Teams have had to work hard during the pandemic to accommodate Covid restrictions and keep volunteers and clients safe through adapted working practices, but it is only this month, two years on, that there have been significant numbers of volunteers and clients infected with the virus, resulting in challenges in maintaining the service. Fortunately, volunteers have pulled together and ensured that the service was uninterrupted.
- Soup Run representatives joined various meetings: Creative Solutions Forum, Plymouth Food Aid Network, Next Meal Global Forum, PCC/Changing Futures programme, Protect and Vaccinate scheme, and Westminster Social Policy Forum on homelessness and rough sleeping. Soup Run volunteers received training on vicarious and secondary trauma provided by the Trauma Informed Plymouth Network.
- There has been little to change our overall impression conveyed a month ago that people are very hungry, are undeterred by hostile weather from coming to get food, and are demonstrating ever higher levels of need and complexity.